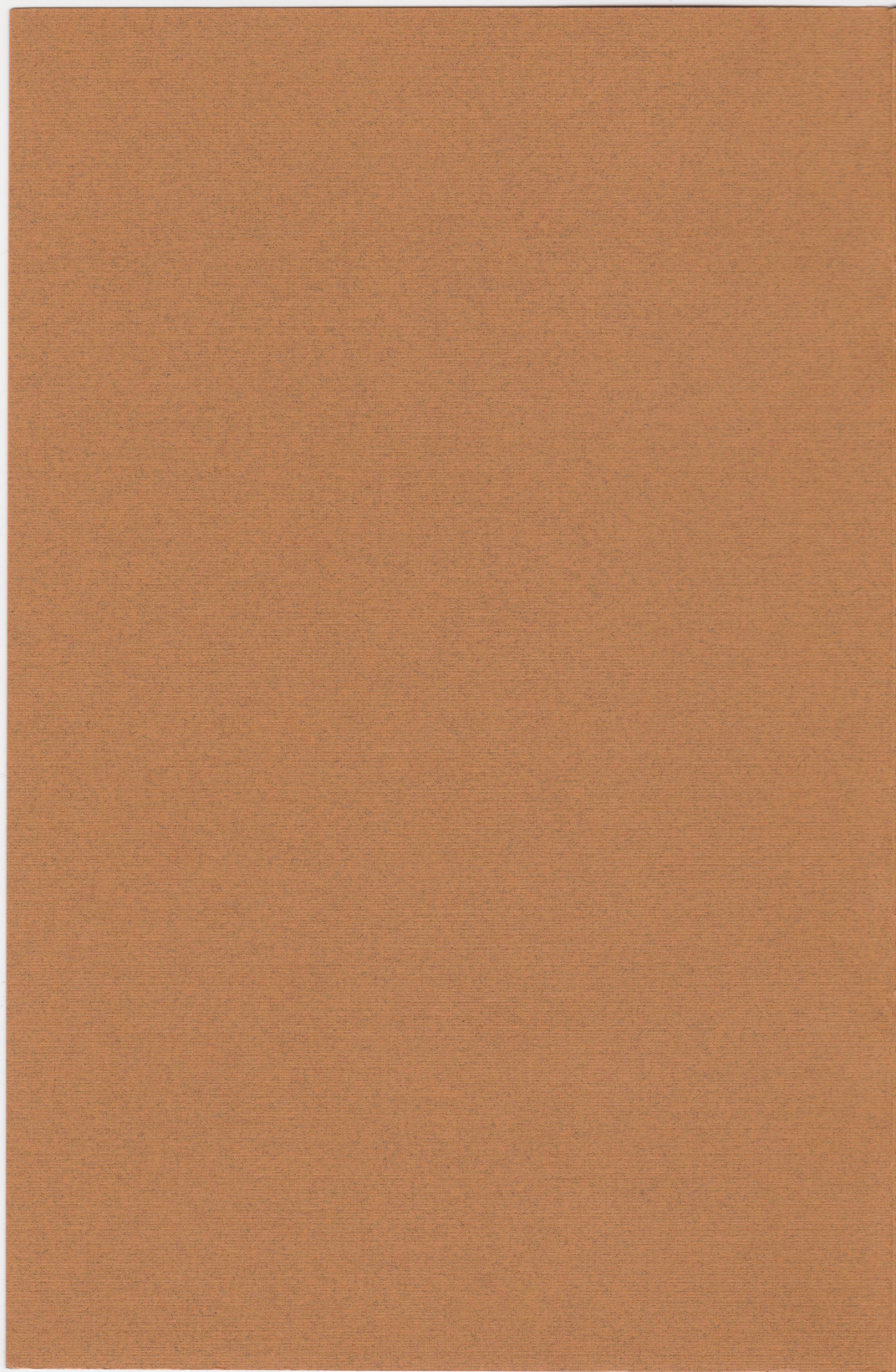


THE "REAL MCCOY"
OF
YPSILANTI

BY

ALBERT P. MARSHALL



500
#120

THE "REAL MCCOY" OF YPSILANTI

BY

ALBERT P. MARSHALL

MARLAN Publishers, Inc.
Ypsilanti, Michigan

THE "REAL MCGOY"
OF
YPSILANTI

BY

ALBERT P. MARSHALL

Reprinted 1998

Copyright 1989
By Albert P. Marshall
All Rights Reserved



Elijah McCoy
1843-1929



Mary E. McCoy
1846-1923

INTRODUCTION

Almost everyone with an interest in the history of Ypsilanti knows that Elijah McCoy was an inventor who lived here in the distant past. Because of the nature of available materials on him, however, few people know enough to really appreciate his contributions to the city. For years Detroiters only knew him as having lived there, but nothing about his earlier life in the city named for the Greek pastor.

This small effort to provide information about the man and his works is not meant to be exhaustive. The reader will see that portions of the tale are fictionalized. I have used my imagination to enliven the subject, based upon other information which is rather common knowledge. Unfortunately we have no autobiographical accounts by which to be guided, and much of what exists is secondary. Neither do I press the claim of the origination of the phrase, "The real McCoy." There have been several "Real McCoy's" in America's past and its use in one place does not negate its use in another. We can be fairly certain that the term now means "the real and authentic" thing, whatever it is.

I would like to dedicate this little volume to Foster Fletcher, the late Historian and Curator of Ypsilanti's Historical Museum. While he lived, he, in a delightful

INTRODUCTION

Almost everyone with an interest in the history of Ypsilanti knows that Elijah McCoy was an inventor who lived here in the distant past. Because of the nature of available materials on him, however, few people know enough to really appreciate his contributions to the city. For years Detroiters only knew him as having lived there, but nothing about his earlier life in the city named for the Greek patriot.

This small effort to provide information about the man and his works is not meant to be exhaustive. The reader will see that portions of the tale are fictionalized. I have used my imagination to enliven the subject, based upon other information which is rather common knowledge. Unfortunately we have no autobiographical accounts by which to be guided, and much of what exists is secondary. Neither do I press the claim of the origination of the phrase, "The real McCoy." There have been several "Real McCoys" in America's past, and its use in one place does not negate its use in another. We can be fairly certain that the term now means "the real and authentic" thing, whatever it is.

I would like to dedicate this little volume to Foster Fletcher, the late Historian and Curator of Ypsilanti's Historical Museum. While he lived, he, in a delightful

way, encouraged my interest in the history of my adopted city. Like most other history buffs, I asked him many questions, but never one which found him without some information. I miss his wise counsel and availability. My wife, Ruthe, also deserves appreciation for having tolerated me in this and other endeavors. When others have cast this aside, she will covet it dearly, simply because her husband was the author.

November, 1988

A. P. Marshall

way, encouraged my interest in the history of my adopted city. Like most other history buffs, I asked him many questions, but never one which found him without some information. I miss his wise counsel and availability. My wife, Ruthie, also deserves appreciation for having tolerated me in this and other endeavors. When others have cast this aside, she will cover it dearly, simply because her husband was the author.

A. P. Marshall

November, 1988

THE "REAL MCCOY" OF YPSILANTI

- George -

George McCoy was one of the most extraordinary kind of men. When he was among his peers, he always seemed to stand out. There was pride in the way he walked, and though he had been a slave since birth, he had the air of a free man. Fortunately his master was one of the more lenient slave owners, one of those who went along with the idea of slavery, though not truly convinced of its morality. Slaves on the McCoy plantation were treated better than those on some neighboring estates. The master had to exhibit a certain civility of course, but the idea of ownership of human beings did not fit well with his basic beliefs.

The McCoy expanse was located in Boone County, Kentucky, not far from the City of Louisville. It was there that George was born in the spring of 1816. The accurate date never seemed important. His mother lived in a small three room hut not far from the "Big House." As this "only child" grew, he came to know his maternal grandmother, who lived with them, and his father who visited often from a neighboring plantation. It was only after George was almost ten that he began to understand why some fathers and mothers

lived with their families and others did not. The care and training he received was at the hands of his mother, sometimes aided by his grandmother who loved him in that special way usually expected of them.

It was out of this environment that George had learned to hold his head high, and was convinced that someday he would be free. When that day came, he told himself, he would be ready to conduct himself like the white men that he knew. He would shoulder the responsibilities of a father and the head of a household.

George's master operated a tobacco shop in downtown Louisville where he made it a practice of using three or four boys from the plantation to train in the art of cigar rolling. There was the choosing of properly cured leaves, and then combining several choice types together in order to create a distinctive aroma. They had to be properly tapered and of uniform size. Thus a well trained boy's value was increased several fold if he could be trusted to shoulder such responsibility. George was chosen when he was about fourteen, and relieved of further work in the fields. Each morning the boy would don his better-than-average slave clothing and ride his horse into town, there to spend the day working in his master's store, making cigars. He soon became so proficient at it that his master realized that his selection of George for this task was a wise one. By the time the

lad was sixteen, he was supervising and training other "rollers." For this work George received a small stipend each week, enough to encourage his dream of freedom. The free blacks with whom the lad sometimes had the opportunity of visiting were gentle reminders that he also must one day be free. Since, as a slave, he did not have to spend his money for food or other necessities, he was able to save most of it. As the amount grew, so did George's hopes and dreams.

When George reached eighteen, he decided to approach his master about being set free. He would watch for the opportune moment when this owner was in a good mood. He tried to think of all the objections that his master might raise. He knew he was considered valuable, and that this alone could be used as an objection. But when he finally approached his master on the subject, there was ready agreement. It was as if it had already been considered. A price of one thousand dollars was agreed upon as the necessary amount for his "papers of freedom." Now the lad would be more frugal than ever, and could expand his already saved three hundred into the necessary amount.

It took George about eighteen months, after which he was ready to buy his freedom. As he waited for his owner to leave the front of the store and to enter his office, the lad's heart pounded with great excitement. Now his dream of freedom would be real. No longer would he be burdened with the shackles of belonging to someone else. Now he could truly be a man,

planning his own future, and taking responsibility for his own actions. When he called upon the master, there was no hesitation. The proper papers attesting to his being a free man were provided. There was just this one request. Would George continue to work for him? The pay would be sufficient to enable him to live in town, and to provide the necessities previously supplied by the master. This was agreed upon, and a more jubilant young man could not be found anywhere. This was the first step in George's life plan. Now he would move on to the second step.

- Millie -

There lived on a neighboring plantation, just a few miles from where George grew up, a young slave girl by the name of Mildred Goins. Called "Millie" by everyone who knew her, she had accepted George's "courtins" and looked forward to marrying him. But Millie wanted first to be free. She, too, had been encouraged by her parents to someday expect freedom, so that she would not spend her life as the property of someone with life and death grips on her existence.

With his newly acquired freedom George unfolded his plans to his lady love. Their hopes and dreams were

mutually shared, the result of many conversations while alone in the evening. He would offer to purchase her freedom, and then they could be married and live in Louisville. He was not sure what price would be demanded, but was sure he could raise the money in time. Of course Millie was agreeable, and they both set their hopes on an affirmative answer from her owner.

When George approached Millie's master, he was quickly rebuffed. She was not for sale, and would never be. The two should stop seeing each other, and George must stay away from the plantation. This was a great disappointment to the two lovers, but they were not to be denied. Certainly there were other ways to fulfill their dreams.

On several occasions George had heard of men in Louisville who would help slaves escape. It did not take him long to be directed by one of the free blacks to where one could be found. As the two men met, caution was urged. No one must be told, not even their own kin. The time must be chosen carefully, and with utmost secrecy. When it came, there would be little time to prepare, and little more than the clothing they were wearing could be brought. The man would contact George in two to three weeks. Meanwhile, the hopeful lad must proceed as routinely as ever, arousing no suspicions from either the blacks nor the whites. When the time came they must move fast.

- *Escape* -

Near midnight on the finally agreed upon day, George and Millie kept their rendezvous with the stranger. They were led down a long path to the Ohio River. There was no moon, so the possibility of their being seen was negligible. A skiff was pulled from its hiding place, and the stranger beckoned the two young people to enter. Soon they were being rowed across the river. On the other side they were met by a dark man with a large hat which almost completely hid his face. Quietly assuring the couple that they should not be afraid, he then beckoned them to follow. A winding path soon brought them into the city, and finally a large partially lit house became visible. It stood on a hill, providing a wide view of the area. Their guide knocked on the door, and as it opened, a friendly and smiling white woman spoke in a soft voice, inviting them to enter. As the couple turned to look at their guide, they realized that he had quietly slipped away into the night.

Inside, the couple was served hot tea and cookies in the parlor, an obvious effort to assure the travelers. In a few minutes they were joined by the man of the house who had entered the room by another door. George was urged to tell his hosts his reasons for wanting to go to Canada. As he was relating his story, another person

entered the room. She was of a medium brown color, of normal height, and was introduced as the maid. Actually, she, too, was an escaped slave who had been persuaded to tarry here for awhile before moving on to Canada. George and Millie talked for over an hour, with occasional questions from their listeners. They related their long and growing desire to be free, and how they both had dreamed of being married after freedom. This was an opportunity they both thought was arranged in heaven, and each looked forward to Canada as the haven of freedom they had dreamed about. Of course they would miss their families and friends, but they also believed that in the future they would be reunited with them.

Following a tasty meal, and the acceptance of new clothes judged more expedient for travel, George and Millie were shown to their beds. George was provided a separate room, while Millie was to share a room with the maid. Both were promised that in a few days arrangements would be complete for their long journey to freedom.

On the fourth day of their stay, the couple was told to make ready for travel. They were cautioned to follow completely the instructions given by the "conductors" along the way. They would travel mostly by night, but in some cases, depending upon local circumstances, might travel by day. The "stations" were usually from ten to fifteen miles apart.

Eventually the couple reached Ypsilanti, Michigan,

where they were met by a local committee. Included in the welcoming group were Mark and Roccena Norris, Mary Starkweather, and Leonard Chase. While the escapees were relaxing in a rather comfortable room in a barn loft, located near the center of the village, they were engaging in small talk with members of the committee. Mary Starkweather's interest was heightened when George related his experience with making cigars. Later in the conversation, she suggested that they might consider remaining in Ypsilanti. She could offer them a home on her place, and felt that there would be little chance of their being discovered by slave hunters. She told about other escaped slaves living in apparent safety in the community. The escapees decided against this offer, choosing to continue their trip to Canada and more certain safety. When nightfall came, and the couple was well rested, they were transported to the next stop, on the way to Detroit.

Once in Canada, the couple was married, and with the help of a welcoming committee, was sent on to Colchester in Essex County, Ontario. There they settled into a small cottage, located on thirty eight acres.

Canada was undergoing an important political upheaval, and this had led to the so-called "Rebel War" of 1837. Shortly after the McCoy's settled, George found himself serving in the ranks of the military forces fighting for unification. Fortunately this side won, and

after being discharged, the government showed its appreciation by presenting him with 160 acres of land.

The young couple did everything possible to make it in their adopted country. As their family started growing, the need for an ample food supply became more and more urgent. William was the first child, followed by two others. The fourth child was named Elijah, born on March 27, 1843. There would be eleven children in all, the last two would be born in Michigan.

Whether because of the depressed economic conditions facing lower Canada, or, of the difficulty adjusting to the extreme cold weather, the McCoys decided to return to the United States, this time settling in Ypsilanti, on the farm of Mary Starkweather, just northwest of the village. The year was 1849.

- Ypsilanti -

Mary Starkweather encouraged George to consider seriously going into the cigar making business. This he did. A few neighboring farmers were contacted about raising specific strains of tobaccos. A small section of the Starkweather farm was used for experimental plantings. Within five years this former Kentuckian was shipping three to four wagons loaded with cigars

to Detroit. Some were placed on trains and boats destined for points east where the aromatic appeal of McCoy's cigars would find greatest appreciation. As demands for his product increased, William, the older son, was placed in charge of another wagon. Under each of these the McCoy's had built a secret compartment large enough to hold two or three persons. Thus, George, in addition to being a "station master," was also a "conductor" on the Underground Railroad, transporting escapees to Detroit.

In 1940, a student at Eastern Michigan University, Richard Oltmanns, conducted research on the Underground Railroad. One of the persons he interviewed was Anna McCoy, a sister of Elijah. She remembered that periodically a letter would arrive from a certain person in Ohio. There followed much hustling and bustling around the McCoy household, accompanied by visits from several people bringing food and clothing. She remembered particular Mrs. Eurotus Morton, a prominent Ypsilantian who often took time to visit with the children.

One day Anna slipped away from her mother and went outside the house. She caught a glimpse of a little girl about her own age just outside the barn and decided to join her in play. Before she could do so, a woman dashed from the barn and pulled the little of black girl inside. About the same time Anna's mother called her into the house, forbidding her to go out again that day. The following day Anna went looking for the

little girl but found no one. Remembering the incident at a later time, she realized that a part of history had been witnessed in that incident.

- Elijah -

Elijah was not quite seven when the family moved to Ypsilanti. A precocious child, he soon began to excel in his school work. He was especially good at mathematics, and later, science. He found an interest in moving objects, and often sat by the tracks which ran along side the river, watching the trains go by. He became a voracious reader absorbing information from whatever books he could borrow or get his father to buy. Like many boys his age, he was enchanted by the men who controlled the trains, some of whom waved to him from their lofty perch inside the locomotives. Sometime the trains would stop nearby, allowing the curious lad to watch as they used those long spouted oil cans to lubricate the engines. He vowed that someday he would be an engineer on one of those locomotives. Encouraged by his parents, Elijah continued to excel in his studies right on through high school, from which he graduated in 1859.

George McCoy was understandably proud of his son. Unlettered himself, his fatherly pride was quite apparent to his new found friends in Ypsilanti. Often he talked about his boy's dreams and aspirations, as he sought their advice on helping his son to achieve his dreams. One of the persons with whom George became acquainted on the local committee of the Underground Railroad was a newcomer to Ypsilanti from Scotland, Thomas McAndrew. Realizing that the few colleges which accepted Afro-Americans did not offer engineering, and that those which did were closed to his son, George sought advice on how his son could continue his education.

McAndrew suggested that there were men in Edinburgh who would take Elijah as an apprentice, and train him to be a railroad engineer. So, in 1859, sixteen year old brown-skinned Elijah was off to Edinburgh, Scotland to spend the next five years in an apprenticeship. Little is known about his experiences in that far-away land, for he seldom talked about them. Certainly the prejudices he met were less severe than those in the United States, but no doubt he met some pressures because of his race. Perhaps this is why Elijah talked little about those experiences.

In 1864, five years after leaving home to study his favorite subject, Elijah returned to Ypsilanti, ready to make good his long held desire to become a locomotive engineer. Since the Michigan Central Railroad had offices in Ypsilanti, he applied for a job. It is not known whether he was denied a job as engineer because of

his race, or whether there were just no vacancies at that time. He accepted a job as a fireman, a position which sometimes led to an engineering one.

Elijah had been on the job only a short time when he began to notice some of the technical shortcomings of railroading. One was the necessity of stopping often for the purpose of applying lubrication to all moving parts of the locomotive. He saw this as wasted time and money.

These were the early days of the Industrial Revolution, and many later refinements remained to be discovered or invented. A case in point was the need for frequent lubrication of the moving parts of engines in order that they may operate efficiently. Friction would develop as the metal parts rubbed against each other, and oil had to be applied to prevent their getting too hot and burning out. Lubrication was and is essential in all kinds of machinery where parts come in contact. By providing a lubricant, resistance is reduced, causing the parts to slide over the thin film of oil or grease.

In the limited space in his father's barn where he conducted his research, McCoy used much of his spare time experimenting with ideas in order to solve the railroad's lubrication problems. He sought books on the subject from local engineers whose friendships he had cultivated, as well as those in his own library. Throughout this period he was working as a fireman for the Michigan Central Railroad, but his dreams were

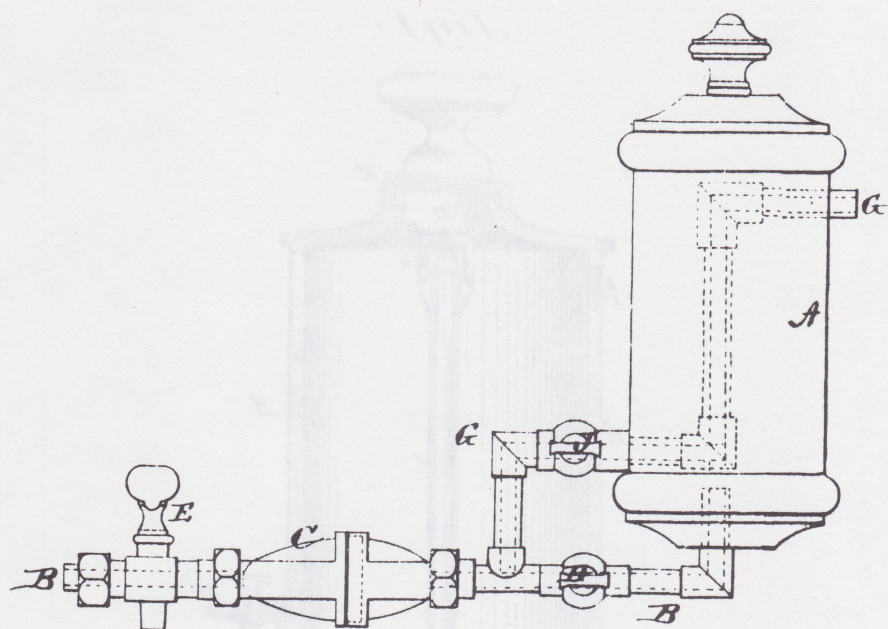
There are basically three kinds of lubricants: solid, partly solid, and liquid. Graphite is the basic mineral used for making solid lubricants. It is used on wood and rough metal to provide a slippery surface by filling the cracks. Partly solid lubricants come from vegetable and animal oils. These thick greases provide lubrication primarily for machinery which moves at slow speeds.

The lubricant most generally used is the liquid type, which is derived from crude oil or petroleum. These are complex mixtures of chemical compounds of carbon and hydrogen. A distilled process is required to separate the useable oil from the mixture, a process known as fractional distillation.

more intense than ever.

On July 23, 1872, Patent Number 129, 843 was granted to McCoy by the United States Patent Office for his Automatic Steam Chest Locomotive Lubrication Device. An improvement was patented on August 6, of the same year, Patent Number 130, 305.

To secure funds to continue his research, the rights to his first oil cup were assigned to S. C. Hamilton of Ypsilanti. Meanwhile, the attention of railroad administrators was drawn to the young inventor as word spread about the savings in time and money with this

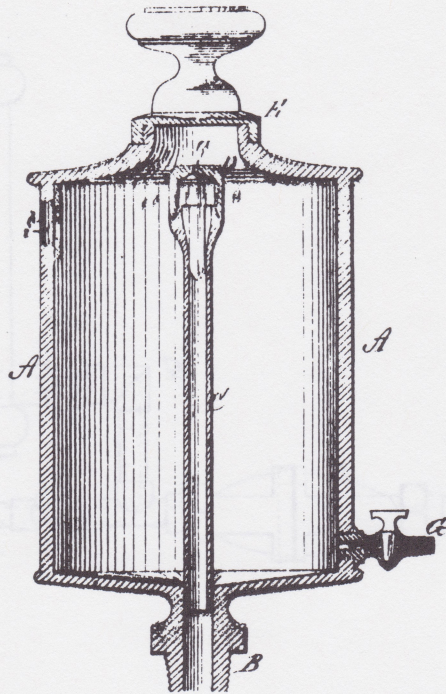


Improvement In Lubricators for Steam Engines

Pat. No. 130, 305

August 6 1872

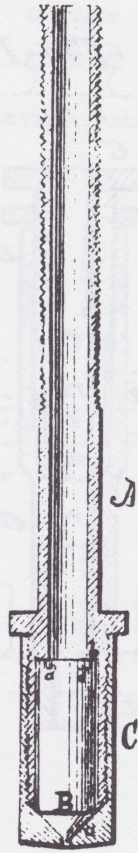
Fig. 1.



Lubricators

Pat. No. 139, 407

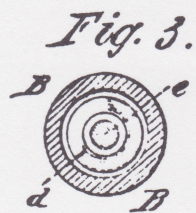
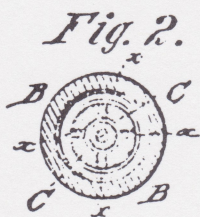
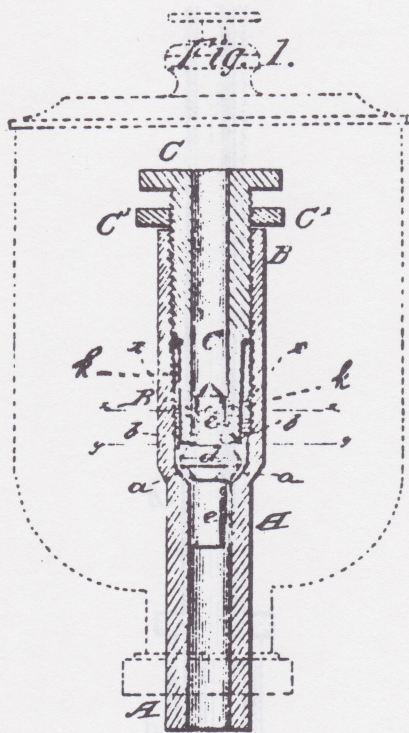
May 27, 1873



Steam-Lubricators

Pat. No. 146, 697

January 20, 1874



Steam-Cylinder Lubricator

Pat. No. 173, 032

February 1, 1876

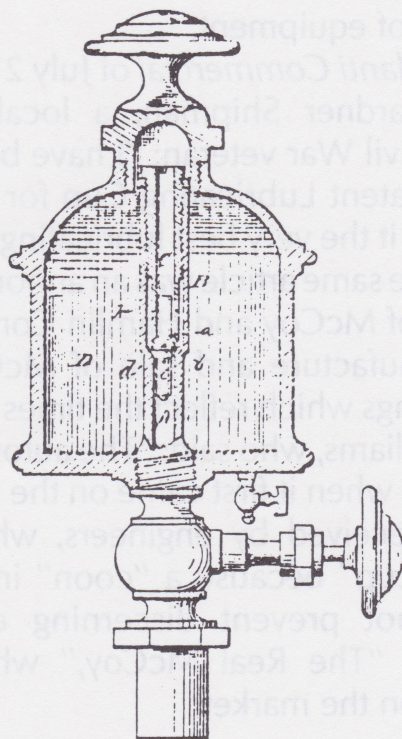
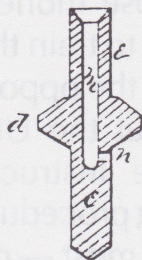


Fig 2



Steam Cylinder Lubricator

Pat. No. 179, 585

July 4, 1876

new piece of equipment.

The *Ypsilanti Commercial* of July 21, 1872, quoted William Gardner Shipman, a local engineer and honored Civil War veteran: "I have been using Elijah McCoy's Patent Lubricating Cup for some time and pronounce it the very best lubricating cup I have ever used." In the same article was an announcement of the formation of McCoy and Hamlin Company, engaged in the manufacture and sale of McCoy's products. Other feelings which reflect the times were expressed by S. R. Williams, who said: "The automatic sight-feed lubrication, when it first came on the market, was not favorably received by engineers, who dubbed it a "nigger oilcup" because a "coon" invented it first." This did not prevent discerning engineers from demanding "The Real McCoy," when faced with imitations on the market.

Railroad officials journeyed to Ypsilanti to meet the man who invented those money-saving devices, as they sought his services to train their workers to install them. This gave McCoy the opportunity of traveling to many places throughout the United States. Over a period of time, while instructing engineers and technicians on installing procedures, little time was left for the work he enjoyed most — developing new ideas and gadgets.

On February 7, 1868, Elijah married Ann Elizabeth Stewart. All that is known about her is that she was born in 1847, and died on May 28, 1872.

- Mary -

On February 25, 1873, Elijah was married to Mary Eleanora Delaney. She was to have a profound effect on his life as long as she lived. Mary was born at Lawrenceburg, Indiana, on January 7, 1846, in an Underground Railroad station. The meager formal schooling she received was at a Freedmen's School in St. Louis, Missouri. With this beginning, Mary became one of the most effective self-educated women of her time. After living in Ypsilanti for five years, the couple moved to Detroit in 1878. They purchased a "white pillared house" at 5730 Lincoln. Though they remained a quite private couple in many ways, this did not prevent Mary from participating in several civic and political activities when she believed in their causes. She became a charter member of the Twentieth Century Club, which included some of the best known women of Detroit (she was the only Afro-American member). Other groups in which she played active roles throw some light upon her interests. She was one of the organizers of the Phyllis Wheatley Home for Aged Colored Women; she was a major supporter of the McCoy Home for Colored Children; she was active with the Federated Colored Women's Clubs of Michigan, serving for a time as state organizer. She was a vice-president of the Lydian Society of Detroit, and became a charter member of the Detroit Chapter of

the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). She was active with the Order of Eastern Star, Prince Hall Affiliate, and belonged to the Willing Workers and the King's Daughters, clubs at Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church of Detroit. She was active in the Women's Suffrage Movement, and also worked in the Democratic Party. This last activity earned her the position of flag bearer from Michigan in President Woodrow Wilson's inauguration parade in the nation's capital.

One of the crowning achievements in Mary McCoy's life was her appointment by Governor Woodbridge N. Ferris to the Michigan Commission for the Half-Century Exposition of Freedmen's Progress. This affair was held in Chicago where several states joined together to recognize the progress made by Afro-Americans since the Emancipation Proclamation. Out of this observance came a volume, *Michigan Manual of Freedmen's Progress*, published by the Michigan Commission, documenting the contributions of the honored group to the State of Michigan. (This book has recently been reproduced by John M. Green of Detroit.

Mary McCoy was very much concerned with the lynching epidemic which took place during the first quarter of the twentieth century, particularly after the First World War. Her published appeal mirrored the depth of her concern:

AN APPEAL

To All Lovers of Humanity, Everywhere!

JUSTICE, where art thou? Thou Church of the Living God, why slumberest thou? Awake! Awake! and hear Ethiopia's cry for her people! Pray tell us, is there any premium on manhood? Is the Negro to educate himself and his children for citizenship only to be denied his rights? Is it just? Is it an exemplification of a Christian Civilization to allow his constitution to be tramped under foot by Anarchists? How long can it be said that the Star Spangled Banner waves o'er the "land of the free, and the home of the brave!" when every day we see humanity murdered by mob violence? Oh! how can a Civilized Nation stand by a human fellow being hung to a tree 'til dead, or burned at the stake and have his fingers and various other portions of his body cut off and mutilated, and used as souvenirs! Is this not worse than barbarism? Does Providence smile on such actions? Can a Christian Nation long exist under such conditions? We say NAY! NEVER!! Several thousand persons have been burned at the stake in the past few years! Fellow workers of the Epworth League, Christian Endeavor, B.Y.P.U. and all Ministers of the Gospel, of any or all denominations, or any Christian worker, no matter who or where, help us as we extend our hands out to you in this appeal for succor in our hour of need, that we may be delivered from a thralldom worse even than that of slavery. Shall we appeal in vain?

We beg of you, as followers of Christ and citizens of this, our great America, "the Land of the free, and the home of the brave!" to lend us your aid in eradicating this evil, and by so doing you will help forward the movement towards solving the great Negro Problem which is now attracting the attention of all great minds.

Yours for God, home and our native land,

MRS. MARY E. McCOY

- The Inventor -

In the years that followed, McCoy took patents on several kinds of lubricators. It is important to know that between 1872 and 1915, all railroad locomotives were equipped with McCoy's sight and feed gravity feed lubricators. They were popular because they covered virtually all locomotive problems.

Nine patents were issued to McCoy from 1889 to 1900. Included were the following: 1) the Dope Cup Lubricator; 2) the Sight Feed Chamber connected with the lubricator; 3) the Heavy Oil Lubricator; 4) an Oil Cup with a support and sight-feed arm; 5) an attachment ensure regular delivery of the lubricant to the working parts of cylinders, varying with the speed of the engine; 6) a method of cleaning the sight-feed glass and oil nozzle without removing them or the oil. All of these were assigned in whole or in part to the Detroit Sheet Metal and Brass Works, and to the Penberthy Injector Company.

During this period McCoy was retained by several companies as a mechanical consultant. One of these was the Detroit Lubricating Company. The Elijah McCoy Manufacturing Firm was organized in 1916, in the old Broadway Markel Building, though it is doubtful that he ever had any decisive role in this company. He was listed as vice-president in 1917, but his name was dropped thereafter. The company went bankrupt a few

years later.

With the advent of the "superheater engine" about 1915 came a demand for a different kind of lubricator. An article by Jason Kelly which appeared in the *Engineer's Journal* pointed out that this new type engine was created without a satisfactory lubrication system available. "Our trouble from trying to lubricate cylinders of superheated engines are not so much due to lack of an oil to withstand the heat of cylinders as to the lack of some way to supply the oil we have with some regularity while the engine is working with full throttle and short cut-offs," Kelly wrote.

A few months later McCoy's Graphite Lubricator came on the market, and shortly was praised for meeting the need about which Kelly wrote. The Superintendent of one of the large railroad companies was asked to comment, and responded: "We have found the McCoy Graphite Lubricator to be of considerable assistance in lubrication of locomotives equipped with superheaters . . . There is a decided advantage in better lubrication and reduction in wear in valves and piston rings, and as a well lubricated engine is more economical in the use of fuel, there unquestionably is a saving in fuel."

A mechanic of another large railroad company, located in Canada, wrote: "It is the best thing in the world, as it saves us a world of trouble." From a master mechanic on an eastern railroad, came the following comment: "Our road Foreman of Engines of our

Philadelphia Division states these lubricants are giving good service." Still another Railroad Superintendent wrote: "For your information I would state that we have under test on engine 106 what is known as the McCoy Graphite Lubricator, two of these lubricators being on the engine referred to, and were applied May 5, 1917. Up to Sept. 1 we had only removed cylinder packing as follows: On June 24, 1917, the engine was stopped on account of blow, and cylinder packing removed, the locomotive made 16,813 miles. Our own packing was applied to the engine and it ran until August 13th, 1917, making 18,446 miles, with the packing, or a total mileage with the two new sets of rings of 35,259 miles. Heretofore, on engines not equipped with the McCoy graphite lubricators we have been fortunate to have the cylinder packing last until the locomotive had from 300 to 1,000 miles By the use of the McCoy Graphite Lubricators we have made great savings in labor and packing rings."

Thus, McCoy's lubricating equipment was well received in this and other countries. He held patents issued in Germany, Great Britain, France, Austria, Russia, and Canada, as well as in the United States.

It should be noted that there were patents for other types of inventions held by McCoy. One was for an "Ironing Table," while another was for a "Lawn Sprinkler."

Though he usually assigned all or part interests in his inventions to others, it is incorrect to assume that he

lived in poverty. It is unfortunate that he did not reap full possible or more remuneration for his inventions. No one has studied his business abilities, nor has his assets during the major part of his life been closely examined. From the evidence at hand, we gather that his mind was constantly "buzzing" with ideas and seeking new challenges. His ingenuity came forth on many occasions when a piece of equipment was needed to solve problems in newly developed machines. It is possible that a combination of time and attitudes prevented his financial success, though Elijah and Mary seem to have lived a comfortable life together.

On his eightieth birthday (1923) McCoy was described as being "perfectly erect and remarkably active. Just recently, to demonstrate to the younger fellows that he could still perform the stunts of youth, he touched the fingers of both hands to the floor by bending forward without allowing his knees to bend in the slightest degree; and immediately afterwards, came near taking off the chin of one of his spectators with the toe of his shoe. Though aged, he is still ambitious, laying big plans as if he were a young man, and working on new ideas to give to the world more useful inventions."

When most Afro-Americans were supporting the Republican Party, the McCoys were ardent Democrats. He supported the party in local, county, state, and national levels. They were both disappointed in

President Wilson, in whose inaugural parade Mary had walked with pride.

"The old inventor liked to spend time with young people, or as he called them, the "young whipper-snappers," an admirer said of him. Speaking of his interest in young men, the friend continued, he was "usually trying to encourage them to have confidence in themselves and their own abilities. He had little patience with the 'young dude' ... who puts everything upon his back and nothing in his head." His advice to young people, according to John Roxborough, a personal friend, was always "Stay in school. Be aggressive. Work Hard."

Mary and Elijah were involved in a traffic accident in early 1920, in which she was hurt rather seriously. Three years later, shortly after their golden wedding anniversary, (February 25, 1923) she died. This seemed to effect Elijah very much, leaving him "bitter, sometimes contrary, ill-tempered, and prone to live in the past," according to one contemporary account. In 1926, his health failing, his friends became more and more concerned about him. He saw few people, choosing to be to himself. In 1928, he was sent to Eloise Infirmary in Wayne, Michigan. He died there on October 10, 1929.

- *Postscript* -

Earl Hutchins one of his close friends, said of the engineer, "McCoy was an honest man and assumed everyone else was honest." Another acquaintance remarked that "he was rather eccentric," and "didn't have the ability to listen and communicate with those who wanted to help him. He didn't think the ordinary man knew enough. He was difficult to approach, difficult to talk to and with." A third observer described him as being "impatient, autocratic, not sociable."

A half century after McCoy's death, Ernest Browne and a group of history buffs discovered that rumors of McCoy's being buried in a pauper's grave were false. Friends had chipped in to purchase a gravesite in the Detroit Memorial Park Cemetery. Browne was instrumental in placing a stone marker at his grave. Mayor Coleman Young declared May 4, 1975 as Elijah McCoy Day, in the mistaken notion that this was his birthday. The Detroit City Council named a street Elijah McCoy Drive. Richard Austin, Secretary of State, presented a plaque to mark the vacant lot where his home once stood, making it a national shrine.

Perhaps one day, Ypsilanti, though not the place of his birth, but where he lived with his family and worked to perfect his first inventions, will have a suitable memorial to one of its most famous citizens.

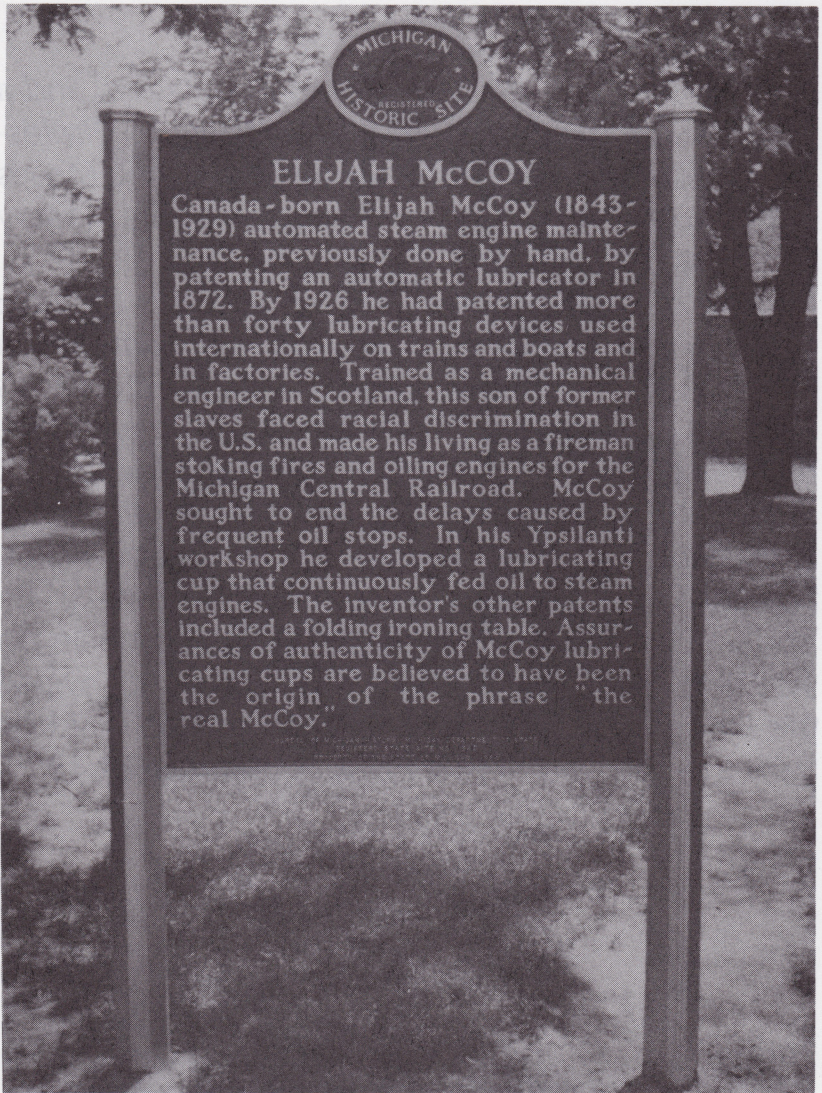
BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

Like many important people who died uneventful deaths, only to be resurrected many years later and given their due recognition, Elijah McCoy's fame took wings in the latter 1960's. Librarians and archivists, caught at first without sufficient references, have since assembled varieties of secondary materials to feed this resurgence of interest in the great inventor of the later 19th and early 20th centuries.

Two major sources of information are the files of the Ypsilanti Historical Museum, and the Burton Historical Collection of the Detroit Public Library. Each can provide articles, pictures, and models of his famous oil cup. A few books provide basic information, especially for children, about his life and works. *Black Pioneers of Science and Invention*, by Louis Haber (Harcourt, Brace & World, 1970) contains a few pages on McCoy, as does *Negro Builders and Heroes*, by Benjamin Brawley (Univ. North Carolina Press, 1937) and *Eight Black American Inventors*, by Robert C. Hayden (Addison-Wesley, 1972). There is a sketch of his life and contributions in the *Dictionary of American Negro Biography*, by Rayford W. Logan and Michael R. Winston (Norton, 1982). The article is by Mae P. Claytor. The *Dictionary of American Biography* (Vol. VI) contains a brief account by Carl W. Mitman. the best contemporary account is in *Colored Detroit: A*

Brief History of Detroit's Colored Population, and a Directory of Their Businesses, Organizations, Professions and Trades, by Arthur Turner and Earl R. Moses (Authors, 1924) Pp. 11-14. A sketch of the life of Mary McCoy is also included.

Other sources examined for this pamphlet include: *Ypsilanti City Directories: The Ypsilanti Commercial* (July 21, 1872); and the *Michigan Manual of Freedmen's Progress Commission* (Reprint, John M. Green, 1985; original 1915). Newspaper articles examined were: "Forgotten Genius: His Inventions Made Millions: He Died Broke," by Monroe Walker, in *Detroit News*, February 4, 1983; "Will Inventor Namesake Be Ypsilanti's Claim to Fame?" by Harry Orscheln, in *Ypsilanti Press*, May 9, 1986; and "Elijah McCoy and the Oilcup: The Inventor Michigan Forgot," by Ron Seigel, in *The Detroit Free Press*, September 28, 1975.



An Elijah McCoy marker was dedicated on June 12, 1994 on the east side of the Ypsilanti Area Public Library. Speaker for the occasion was Esther Gordy Edwards, a Michigan State Historical Commissioner. Sponsor of the effort was the Ypsilanti Rotary Club and Brown Chapel AME Church.

